



# Social-Ecological Awareness and Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Ecotourism Political Paradigm

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**Abstract.** After the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government must consider political strategies to improve its economy. Tourism has become a country's leading commodity as an answer to the non-extractive industrial model. Tourism in the concept of ecotourism. This research aims to comprehensively understand the reality of ecotourism in Indonesia and pinpoint the main problems. Consequently, it can be seen what kind of policy design can encourage social-ecological awareness. The research method used in this research is qualitative, with a literature study type. The result of this research is that by strengthening the substance of ecotourism policy in Indonesia, social-ecological awareness can be encouraged through ecotourism.

**Keywords:** Politics, Policy, Ecotourism, Socio-Ecological Awareness

## 1 Introduction

It is common knowledge how a country's economy has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so the government must think about political strategies to improve its economy. Amid the downturn in the tourism industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, President Joko Widodo has given some hope to the tourism sector. Several regions have prepared everything related to the plan to open tourism destinations in the new normal era by implementing health protocols, which are officially regulated in the Keputusan Menteri Kesehatan Republik Indonesia dengan No. HK.01.07/MENKES/382/2020 Tentang Protokol Kesehatan bagi Masyarakat di Tempat dan Fasilitas Umum dalam Rangka Pencegahan dan Pengendalian COVID-19 which were determined and came into effect on June 19 2020 [1].

Tourism has become a country's leading commodity as an answer to the non-extractive industrial model. There is an opinion that after the COVID-19 pandemic, public awareness is slowly moving towards social-ecological awareness, especially through the tourism sector [2]. We recognize tourism activities that prioritize aspects of environmental sustainability, especially in conservation areas, as ecotourism.

Rafl Buckley [3] said that whether ecotourism is good in conservation areas depends on political practices in the area concerned and the characteristics of tourism companies. At this point, the relationship between politics and ecotourism becomes one closely related to our social-ecological future.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism development product that is oriented towards environmental sustainability. In developing national ecotourism, regulatory and policy aspects are fundamental to study as a basis for the orientation of the parties in implementing development in various regions. The failure of ecotourism development occurs due to overlapping management, disharmony in policies, laws, and regulations, and sectoral egos in each ministry as the person responsible for ecotourism development. In the development of ecotourism, four agencies have the authority to manage and make policies and legislation regarding ecotourism. These ministries include the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. However, in the dynamics of tourism and ecotourism regulations in Indonesia, it can be said that it has yet to be able to prioritize the space for scientific objectivity and the application of a directed vision. Apart from that, the existence of indications of political aspects in the formulation of concepts and implementation of ecotourism development is also an important thing that needs to be studied comprehensively [4].

If social-ecological awareness can be encouraged from the ecotourism sector, then is ecotourism in Indonesia currently supported by government policies? This research aims to comprehensively understand the reality of ecotourism in Indonesia and pinpoint the main problems. So, what kind of policy design can encourage social-ecological awareness can be seen.

## 2 Research Methods

Research with a tourism political dimension tends to be incidental, with social, economic, or environmental considerations as the focus. Even if it is related to tourism policy, research with the political dimension of tourism should consider more about what the goal is and not what and how it happens. It can be further stated that in tourism research, the relationship between politics and tourism can occur at the international, national, regional, local, and individual levels [5].

This research uses a qualitative research approach with a type of literature study, where data sources come from books, journals, essays, news portals on the internet, and government policy documents related to ecotourism. Data analysis was carried out by critically reading ecotourism issues in Indonesia. After analysis, at the writing stage, it will be constructed descriptively based on the facts that appear or are as they are, and then general conclusions will be drawn based on these facts [6].

### 3 Critical Review

#### 3.1 Ecotourism and Economic Growth

It is common knowledge how a country's economy has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so the government must think about political strategies to improve its economy. One of them is ecotourism. The government realizes that Indonesia has abundant natural wealth to be packaged into ecotourism [7]. Economic recovery through ecotourism has proven successful. When the economic downturn of the 2007-2008 period hit European countries, it turned out that ecotourism was able to support economic growth through supporting job creation and increasing tax revenues [8]. It's very good indeed; it's just that economic profit is not the main goal, but it is necessary to think about how to involve local communities and preserve the area [9]. Indonesia at least needs to reflect on Western Australia through several points [10]:

- There is an intrinsic recognition that conservation areas are only used for tourism to introduce flora, fauna, and natural landscapes. Thus, infrastructure development and the addition of massive, disruptive tourist attractions must be avoided.
- Linking ecotourism with cultural richness, which complements the tourism product portfolio.
- Encouragement of investment and conservation simultaneously in ecotourism and cultural areas. This means that the perspective used is not only about how to develop destinations and strategies for attracting tourists but also how to maintain destination sustainability.
- The presence of ecotourism standards that are recognized, publicly known, and consistently implemented. This will provide tourists with a positive perception that sustainability is not being neglected.
- There is educational content that can inspire tourists about how valuable Indonesia's tourism assets are.

#### 3.2 Involvement of Local Communities in Ecotourism Areas

In developing ecotourism, the involvement of local communities raises pros and cons, as happened in the Wakatobi Islands, which is an ecotourism area. Based on research by the Sajogyo Institute [11].

Local people in the Wakatobi Islands who are pro believe that their source of livelihood is very dependent on the sea. However, there is a zoning where people are not allowed to access and use the sea. This zoning puts the local community of the Wakatobi Islands in a dilemma, on the one hand, because it reduces sources of livelihood. On the other hand, the local community of the Wakatobi Islands understands that their underwater wealth must be protected because it is the center of the world's coral triangle, which is the ecosystem for the world's marine biota. This dilemma then becomes the reason for the need for an alternative that allows the local people of the Wakatobi Islands to be still able to obtain sources of life but also protect nature. So the solution is tourism, tourism in the ecotourism concept.

Meanwhile, the local people of the Wakatobi Islands are against it because of concerns about the fading of ancestral values due to the influx of various value systems

from outside. Apart from the natural beauty it offers, other things that are considered attractive are local values or local traditions. This further aggravates people's concerns if the local values in question will be commodified in the world of tourism so that sacred values will be converted into exchange value because consumerism always goes hand in hand with tourism. In line with this, it is not surprising that a handful of people intend to spend their time enjoying the nature of Wakatobi, or the popular term now is traveling. In addition, migration patterns between countries are currently moving very quickly, so controls are needed to overcome the negative excesses that arise. Moreover, social changes are very fast. These changes can be seen from the transformation of norms and values. Changes in the transformation of norms and values can be seen from changes in cultural commodification, marginalization, imitation, tradition, religion, language, and consumption patterns. These changes refer to struggles over control, ownership, and distribution of agrarian resources, often leading to agricultural conflicts. Apart from the social changes that have occurred, the policy of the Badan Otoritas Pariwisata (BOP), which has unified the 10 Kawasan Strategis Pariwisata Nasional (KSPN), is based on the same motive, namely economic acceleration in the country's foreign exchange. Although the consequences of tourism activities raise awareness of environmental sustainability, this awareness is also built based on economic motives, that nature is an asset [12].

### **3.3 Paradigms and Policies in the Ecotourism Sector**

Every policy made by the government has an underlying paradigm. According to George Ritzer [13], a paradigm is a scientist's fundamental view of what subject matter should be studied by a branch of science. So, this is the main problem in one branch of science, according to the versions of certain scientists. Paradigms help formulate what must be studied, what questions must be answered, how they should be answered, and what rules must be followed in interpreting the information collected to answer these questions.

The tourism development paradigm has evolved from mass tourism to sustainable tourism [14]. Around the 1980s, an alternative tourism concept was born, which provided a critique of the old tourism paradigm. Tourism development in the old paradigm tends to be massive development characterized by rapid growth, exploitation of natural resources without paying attention to their sustainability, and marginalization of the interests of local communities. A new tourism paradigm then emerged as a critique of all deviations from mass tourism practices. This new concept became popularly called ecotourism. Sustainable nature-based tourism activities with a focus on experience and education about nature managed using a certain management system and having the lowest negative impact on the environment, non-consumptive and locally oriented (in terms of control, benefits that can be taken from business activities). The Quebec Declaration specifically states that ecotourism is a form of tourism that adopts the principles of sustainable tourism.

From the sustainable paradigm, it then becomes the principles of ecotourism development, as we can see from The Ecotourism Society group [15]:

- Prevent and overcome the impact of tourist activities on nature and culture. Prevention and mitigation are adapted to the nature and characteristics of local nature and culture.

- Environmental conservation education. Educate tourists and local communities about the importance of conservation. This educational process can be carried out directly in nature.

- Direct income for the region. Arrange so that areas used for ecotourism and conservation area management can receive direct income or revenue. Levy and conservation tax can be used directly to develop, preserve, and improve the quality of natural conservation areas.

- Community participation in planning. The community is invited to plan ecotourism development. Likewise, in supervision, the community is expected to participate actively.

- Community income. The real benefits to the community's economy from ecotourism activities encourage people to preserve natural areas.

- Maintain harmony with nature. All development efforts, including the development of facilities and utilities, must maintain harmony with nature. If there is an attempt to disharmonize nature, it will damage this ecological tourism product. Avoid the use of oil as far as possible, conserve flora and fauna, and maintain the authenticity of community culture.

- Environmental carrying capacity. In general, the natural environment has a lower carrying capacity than the carrying capacity of artificial areas. Even though the demand may be huge, it is the carrying capacity that limits it.

- Income opportunities for a large portion of the country. If a conservation area is developed for ecotourism, foreign exchange and tourist spending are encouraged to be enjoyed as much as possible by the country, state, or local regional government.

In Indonesia itself, ecotourism also has a definition and development principles contained in the Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri No. 33 Year 2009 Tentang Pedoman Pengembangan Ekowisata di Daerah. The development principles are:

- Match between types and characteristics of ecotourism.

- Conservation, namely protecting, preserving, and sustainably utilizing natural resources used for ecotourism.

- Economical, namely providing benefits to local communities, driving economic development in the region, and ensuring that ecotourism businesses can be sustainable.

- Education, which contains elements of education to change a person's perception so that they have concern, responsibility, and commitment to preserving the environment and culture.

- Provide satisfaction and experience to visitors.

- Community participation, namely the role of the community in planning, utilizing, and controlling ecotourism activities by respecting the socio-cultural and religious values of the community around the area.

- Accommodating local wisdom.

Apart from the Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri No. 33 the Year 2009 concerning Pedoman Pengembangan Ekowisata di Daerah, which has been mentioned above, other policies regulate ecotourism development in Indonesia [16], namely: 1) Law No. 10 the

Year 2009 concerning Kepariwisata; 2) Law No. 5 the Year 1990 concerning Konservasi Keanekaragaman Hayati dan Ekosistemnya; 3) Law No. 41 Year 1999 concerning Forestry; 4) Law No. 27 Year 2007 concerning Pengelolaan Wilayah Pesisir dan Pulau-Pulau Kecil; dan 5) Law No. 23 Year 2014 concerning Local Government. All these policies need clear, comprehensive, and structured objectives, so the substantive dynamics contained and stated in these laws are still partial.

As Rafl Buckley [17] said, whether ecotourism is good depends on political practices in the area concerned and the characteristics of the tourism company, which in turn is supported by policy.

In September 2022, the World Tourism Day forum will be held in Bali. This forum is the first step in collaboration between various parties, including the national government, regional government, communities, NGOs, media, and academics, to build a roadmap for ecotourism in Indonesia [18]. This is the first step after the COVID-19 pandemic to develop ecotourism and a commitment to preserving the environment in general.

### **3.4 Maintaining Sustainability in Ecotourism Areas**

So that ecotourism is not just a nature-based tourism destination, the policy must be built into an integrated regulatory system, with a paradigm substance oriented towards environmental sustainability (sustainable tourism). With such a policy design, social-ecological awareness through ecotourism is more accessible to realize, as in Kapoposang Island, an ecotourism area.

The ecotourism area in Pangkep Regency is Kapoposang Island. In the Local Government Working Plan (RKPD) Pangkajene and Kepulauan Regency Year 2022, the Kapoposang Islands Marine Nature Tourism is a National Marine Conservation Area (KKPN) designated based on the Decision Letter of Forest Minister No.588/Kpts-VI/1996 as a Nature Tourism Park. Kapoposang Island has an area and average coral reef of approximately 995.6 Ha, the largest among other fringing reefs. The distribution of coral reefs extends westward from a depth of 1 meter to 45 meters with obvious waters [19]. The area coverage of the Management and Zoning Plan for the Kapoposang Islands Aquatic Tourist Park and the Surrounding Seas includes the waters of 6 (six) islands, namely Kapoposang Island, Pajalan Island, Tambakhulu Island, Gondong Bali Island, Panggangangan Island, and Suranti Island. Determination of the Kapoposang Islands Marine Nature Tourism Park covering an area of 49,946,688 hectares. This coverage is based on the Minutes of Handover of Nature Reserve Areas and Nature Conservation Areas from the Departemen Kehutanan to Departemen Kelautan dan Perikanan No.: BA.01/Menhut-IV/2009-BA 108/MEN.KP/III/2009 dated March 4.

The number of tourist visits to the Kapoposang Island ecotourism area consistently increases yearly, even during the COVID-19 pandemic [20].

**Table 1.** Kapoposang Island Tourist Visits (2018-2021)

Visiting Month	Year				Total
	2018	2019	2020	2021	
January	0	0	20	0	20
February	0	0	0	45	45
March	0	8	0	24	32
April	0	0	0	14	14
May	0	6	0	61	67
June	0	32	0	94	126
July	0	21	16	48	85
August	44	12	53	45	154
September	12	14	15	57	98
October	0	40	92	0	132
November	19	0	25	0	44
December	0	30	3	0	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>850</b>

At first glance, it can be said that the existence of transportation and lodging infrastructure for tourists on Kapoposang Island is physically fine. However, new infrastructure development problems are found in the non-physical aspects of infrastructure buildings, namely licensing regulations. In other words, this concerns a policy issue. To be precise, in June 2023, FAJAR released an investigation entitled Kongkalikong Kapoposang, which essentially contained business activities operating illegally in an area of 3000 meters [21] [22]. This indicates at least two things: First, the existence of accommodation infrastructure that is managed by the private sector and does not have a permit indicates that there are indications of politics in licensing regulations among the stakeholders involved; Second, the absence of licenses for the construction of accommodation infrastructure indicates that there are ecological indications, where development is carried out by ignoring the principles of ecotourism itself so that the implementation of ecotourism governance is an urgent matter for the local government to carry out.

#### 4 Conclusion: Ecotourism and Socio-Ecological Awareness

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the national economy. There is historical evidence that ecotourism can support economic growth. However, economic benefits are only one of the goals of ecotourism. Based on the reconstruction above, the important goals of ecotourism, which are also a challenge for the government, are: first, the involvement of local communities in ecotourism areas, which face challenges because they find pros and cons, as is the case in the Wakatobi Islands ecotourism area; second,

maintaining sustainability in ecotourism areas which also face challenges due to unclear licensing regulations, as is the case in the Kapoposang Island ecotourism area.

Apart from that, to encourage tourists' understanding regarding environmental sustainability itself, the government must design policies that are based on environmental sustainability (sustainable tourism) and are integrated.

So, apart from having an impact on a country's economy, ecotourism is also expected to be able to encourage social-ecological awareness in society through tourism activities at ecotourism objects. Awareness that preserving the environment is a form of action to protect human life. This social-ecological awareness can be encouraged or stimulated, one of which is through ecotourism, and life after the COVID-19 pandemic is the right moment.

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